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Under A Fool's Cap

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To

Mark Simmonds.

On his birth Day

April 17th 1788.

from Reginald Lee.

Under a Fool's Cap.

UNDER A FOOL'S CAP

SONGS

BY

DANIEL HENRY, JUN.

HOLMES, DANIEL HENRY

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*
* *

OLDEN friends, though dressed anew,
Goslings of that Dean of Mothers,
Trimmed and combed,—still, it is true,
Olden friends, though dressed anew;
Here I dedicate to you,
Oh my Sister-geese . . . and brothers!
Olden friends, though dressed anew,
Goslings of that Dean of Mothers!

I.

King Cole.

Old King Cole was a jolly old soul,
A jolly old soul was he:
He called for his pipe and he called for his bowl,
And he called for his fiddlers three.

HIS day was done, and the sands had run
Through the measuring glass so long,
That now there was left to his setting sun,
But a pipe, and a bowl, and a song.

But while the wine holds out to shine,
The pipe holds out to burn,
Why should a wise old greybeard pine?
A fond old dreamer yearn?

So, day growing dim, he filled to the brim
His pipe, and his bowl also,
And bade his fiddlers three play to him
The burdens of Long-ago,

That their spell may lift, through the purple drift
Of the smoke, and the fire of the wine,
The long-dead Past in its burial-shift,
Like a ghost at a wizard's sign.

Then his fiddlers three made melody
So strange and potent of spell,
That the darkness grew as a peopled sea
With the shadows, once loved so well,

And the whole vast Yore uprose once more
On its world-wide phantom wings,
And drifted past, to the magic lore
That wept from the viol-strings.

First, the battle-field, where two armies reeled,
Under flashing and clashing of swords,
Then, the huge grim hall, where on lifted shield,
A boy-king was hailed by the Lords:

The postern gate, where he used to wait,
For the sweetheart—oftentimes—
Then the darkened church where she came in state
At the call of the wedding chimes.

Every scene and place—every form and face—
Which the past in its glory had used,
Rolled on, in a pageant of stately pace,
Before King Cole, as he mused.

So the music sped, as the hours fell dead
In the ebb of the ghostly stream,
While the king sat wagging his wise white head
And smiled and sighed at his dream.

And there seemed to rise weird signals and cries
From the serried ranks and dim,
As though dumb throats and blinded eyes
Were beckoning to him.

At last the old sweet songs were told,
The ash in the pipe turned white,
The emptied beaker slipped from his hold,
And the dream sank back into night.

The fiddlers rose, and lay down their bows,
They knew they had played their last:
King Cole lay back, and his eyes were close,
He had followed after the Past.

II.

Violet's Blue.

Violet's blue—Diddle, diddle!
Lavender's green,
When I am king—Diddle, diddle!
You shall be queen.

YOU shall have crown—Diddle, diddle!
Jewels and gold,
Damasks and lace—Diddle, diddle!
Centuries old.

Pages behind—Diddle diddle!
Heralds before,
And all the state—Diddle, diddle!
Queens had of yore.

But when you're queen—Diddle, diddle!
And I am king,
Will your eyes shine—Diddle, diddle!
Will my lips sing,

As they do now—Diddle, diddle!
When we are still,
Poor country-folk—Diddle, diddle!
Plain Jack and Jill?

Can our hearts beat—Diddle, diddle!
Our love unfold,
Prisoned in pomp—Diddle, diddle!
Girdled with gold?

Love thrives alone—Diddle, diddle!
In open air;
Where pageants are—Diddle, diddle!
Love is not there.

Where skies are blue—Diddle, diddle!
And fields are green,
I will be king—Diddle, diddle!
You shall be queen.

Queen of Day-Dreams—Diddle, diddle!
King of No-lands,
With full-filled hearts—Diddle, diddle!
And empty hands.

Let others king—Diddle, diddle!
And queen, who will:
We're better so—Diddle, diddle!
Plain Jack and Jill.

III.

Willy Winkie.

Wee wee Willy Winkie,
Runs through the town,
Upstairs and downstairs
In his nightgown,
Tapping at the window,
Peeping at the lock:—
"Are all the babies gone to bed?
It's now ten o'clock!"

THEN when noises all are still,
Lamps all burn low,
Bolted doors and windows creak,
Open—and tiptoe,
With his lanthorn and his staff,
Grimly night-gowned,
Like a watchman of the Night
Winkie goes his round.

For of all the Angel guard,
Time out of mind,
He it is hath had in charge
All Baby-kind,

From the mud-lark, fast asleep
On bare curbstone,
To the puppet, plump and pink,
Heir to the throne.

So when steeple clocks have tolled
Sleep-time at hand,
When mammas and nurses rub
Eyes full of sand:
Silver rattles all are hushed,
Pink lids all furled,
Winkie comes to oversee
His little world.

Ay! but there is much to do
For boys and girls:
Wee bald heads to trim with floss,
Empty mouths with pearls,
Little pudding legs to mould
Into human shapes;
General repairs besides:
Scratches and scrapes.

There is much to teach likewise
To girls and boys,

How to caterwaul for pins,
And crow for toys,
How to clutch at pleasant beards
Coming too close,
How to neatly cram the mouth
With fists and toes.

Then reports to be received
From baby friends,
Litter'd all about the place
In odds and ends,
Rattles, rings and rag-dolls
Cast on the shelves,
Shoes and socks, that sulk because
Left to themselves.

Then if he make up his mind
From what they tell,
Baby, where its lines have fall'n,
Isn't faring well.
Presto! Wee wee Winkie
Bends o'er the bed,
Picks up Baby, and away! . . . .
Some think it dead:

But the sly old watchman
Winkie knows best,
He has made for some bleak home
With no baby bless'd,
There he lays his charge to sleep,
And with the morn,
There is much to-do about
Baby, New-born.

Upstairs and down, he goes
In his night-gown,
Till the Day comes peeping
Into the town;
Then he throws all shutters wide,
Lets down the bars. . . .
Goodnight, Watchman! Off he flies
To blow out the stars.

IV.

Bell Horses.

Bell horses, Bell horses,
What time of day?
—One o'clock! Two o'clock!
Three! and away.

I SHALL wait by the gate
To see you pass,
Closely press'd, three abreast,
Clanking with brass:

With your smart red mail-cart
Hard at your heels,
Scarlet ground, fleck'd around
With the Queen's seals.

Up the hills, down the hills,
Till the cart shrink
To a faint dab of paint
On the sky-brink,

Never stop till you drop
On to the town,
Bearing great news of state
To Lords and Crown.

And down deep in the keep
Of your mail cart,
There's a note that I wrote
To my sweetheart.

I had no words that glow,
No penman's skill,
And high-born maids would scorn
Spelling so ill;

But what if it be stiff
Of hand and thought,
And ink-blots mark the spots
Where kisses caught,

He will read without heed
Of phrases' worth,
That I love him above
All things on earth.

I must wait here, till late
Past Evensong,
Ere you come tearing home—
Days are so long !—

But I 'll watch, till I catch
Your bells chime clear . . . .
If you 'll bring *me* something?—
Won't you please, dear?

V.

My Lady's Garden.

How does my Lady's garden grow?
How does my Lady's garden grow?
With silver bells, and cockle-shells,
And pretty girls all in a row.

ALL fresh and fair, as the spring is fair,
And wholly unconscious they are so fair,
With eyes as deep as the wells of sleep,
And mouths as fragrant as sweet June air.

They all have crowns and all have wings,
Pale silver crowns and faint green wings,
And each has a wand within her hand,
And raiment about her that cleaves and clings.

But what have my Lady's girls to do?
What maiden toil or spinning to do?
They swing and sway the live-long day
While beams and dreams shift to and fro.

And are so still that one forgets,
So calm and restful, one forgets
To think it strange they never change,
Mistaking them for Margarets.

But when night comes and Earth is dumb,
When her face is veil'd, and her voice is dumb,
The pretty girls rouse from their summer drowze,
For the time of their magic toil has come.

They deck themselves in their bells and shells,
Their silver bells and their cockle-shells,
Like pilgrim elves, they deck themselves
And chaunting Runic hymns and spells,

They spread their faint green wings abroad,
Their wings and clinging robes abroad,
And upward through the pathless blue
They soar, like incense smoke, to God,

Who gives them crystal dreams to hold,
And snow-white hopes and thoughts to hold,
And laughter spun of beams of the sun,
And tears that shine like molten gold.

And when their hands can hold no more,
Their chaliced hands can hold no more,
And when their bells, and cockle-shells,
With holy gifts are brimming o'er,

With swift glad wings they cleave the deep,
As shafts of starlight cleave the deep,
Through Space and Night they take their flight
To where my Lady lies asleep;

And there, they coil above her bed,—
A fairy crown above her bed—
While from their hands, like sifted sands,
Falls their harvest winnowèd.

And this is why my Lady grows,
My own sweet Lady daily grows,
In sorcery such, that at her touch,
Sweet laughter blossoms and songs unclose.

And this is what the pretty girls do,
This is the toil appointed to do,
With silver bells, and cockle-shells,
Like Margarets all in a row.

VI.

Burnie Bee.

Burnie Bee! Burnie Bee!
Tell me when will your wedding be?
If it be to-morrow day
Take your wings and fly away.

GO prepare your honey-house
For the wedding feast to come,
If you needs must work: I say
Take your wings and fly away.

Let your quest be what it will,
Be it love, or labour still,
Get you hence, while yet you may,
Take your wings and fly away.

Do you see these listless flowers
Dancing through the shining hours
In a gracefully rhythmic play?
Take your wings and fly away.

In their robes of gorgeous hues,
From sharp reds to mellow blues,
Like a ravell'd rainbow's spray?
Take your wings and fly away.

With their girdled breasts of gold,
And the jewels manifold
Of their dancing-girl's array?
Take your wings and fly away.

Fair are they beyond compare,
Yet withal they are so fair,
Death is not more dread than they!
Take your wings and fly away.

In their wanton wealth of dyes,
In their perfume-sated eyes,
Strange spells sleep, and philtres stay;
Take your wings and fly away.

He who ventures close to them,
Though he touch but to the hem
Of their garments as they sway—
Take your wings and fly away.

He will suddenly grow fain,
Fever with a nameless pain,
That no physic can allay,—
Take your wings and fly away.

All things fair will pall on him,
All but their lithe stems grow dim,
All but their buds pale and gray,—
Take your wings and fly away.

And his soul—fire-crown'd and shod—
Will go sorrowing like a God
Fallen from the stars astray—
Take your wings and fly away.

For these are the poison-flowers,
Foster'd by the Demon-Powers:
Art and Song, for Man's decay!
Take your wings and fly away.

Those who know them, not again
Shall they be as other men,
Though they travail, though they pray,
Take your wings and fly away.

But shall bear the cursed gift,
Without respite, without shift,
Till they sleep beneath the clay,
Take your wings and fly away.

Burnie Bee! Burnie Bee!
By your love, your bride to be,
Listen to me, and obey:
Take your wings and fly away.

VII.

Daffy-Down-Dilly.

Daffy-down-dilly has come up to town,
In her green petticoat and yellow gown.

FROM the far-away South,
Where endless Summer sleeps endless dreams,
With her eyes and hair full of loose sunbeams,
And a kiss on her mouth;

And lo! she stands in the market-place,
In the broil and babble, the trouble and chase
Of all trades and degrees,
—A poet's dream of the Bayadère—
With her naked arms, and slender legs bare
Up to the knees.

The town is dreary, the town is dead,
A pall of smoke coils about its head,
And the day drags by,
With pinch'd wan features and sullen trudge,
A hopeless day, like a worn-out drudge
That is trying to die.

Folk pass beside her, standing there,
In their daily rounds, too cheerless to care
For the child of Chance,
Till Daffy-down-dilly suddenly trips
Her tambourine over her finger-tips
And begins to dance.

Oh! that dance! the dance of the Fauns of old!
The swell and swerve, as the muscles unfold,
Then the measures warm,
As the limbs go mad, the pulses sting,
Till the very soul spreads fiery wing,
Astride the storm.

About her the people come, by degrees,
Uncertain at first, then ill at ease,
As the spell of her spreads,
Till a sunbeam strikes like a sabre-flash,
And turns to fire and gold the trash
Of her gypsy-shreds.

And then, her witchery reigns supreme:
The streets flash white, the houses gleam,
While in maddening whirl,

From end to end of the market-place
A frenzied chorus of dance keeps pace
With the dancing-girl.

And it seems as though Almighty Pan
Had sudden blown in the nostrils of man
His fiery breath of laughter:
So Daffy-down-dilly came up to town,
In her green petticoat and yellow gown,
And April came after.

VIII.

Cock-a-doodle-do.

Cock-a-doodle-do!
My dame has lost her shoe,
My master's lost his fiddle-stick,
And don't know what to do.

THE red-eyed street-lamps glow,
Like embers burning low,
And ghastly dawn is breaking, thick
With silence and falling snow.

For miles and miles ahead,
The streets, untrodden, spread,
Bescatter'd as with ashes, for
The Carnival is dead.

Vague shadows, blurred of form,
Hugg'd close, to keep them warm,
With nodding heads and gait footsore,
Go trudging through the storm.

Some, bundled to the nose
In furs, and some half-froze
Beneath their flimsy masquing-weeds
And shivering silken hose;

By twos and threes, and some
In single file, they come:
A broken string of motley beads,
All tangled out of plumb,

All sorts of crosses and kins:
Monks, monkeys, mandarins,
Limp pantaloons, and towzled clowns,
And batter'd harlequins,

Tame goblins, sleepy sprites,
Glum ladies, rueful knights,
Pale slender angels in drabbled gowns,
Plump devils in ravell'd tights:

All races, and creeds, and climes,
All costumes, masques, and mimes,
In a broil of colour, untuned and unkey'd,
Like the jingle of crazy chimes.

And, arm in arm, God wot!
The sorriest of the lot,
My master, as an old Volkslied,
My dame, as a Gavotte.

He, smock'd in brindle pelt,
Cross-thong'd at legs with felt,
With leathern hood, sharp'd to a peak,
And cow-bells at his belt;

And she, all lace and gilt,
O'er her bodice of damask quilt,
While her red-clock'd stockings hide and seek
Through the slits of her velvet kilt.

But alas for their quips and pranks!
Against his lagging shanks,
His fiddle, widow'd of its bow,
Melancholically clanks,

And she drags at his sleeve,
Too sleepy to perceive
That, somewhere in the slush and snow,
Her slipper took French leave.

Poor Carnival! God speed!
None mourn thee now, none heed:
When Song goes dumb, and Dance grows numb,
It's fasting-time indeed.

IX.

High-Diddle-Diddle.

High-diddle-diddle!
The cat play'd the fiddle,
The cow jump'd ober the moon,
The little dog laugh'd
To see such craft,
And the dish ran away with the spoon.

AND there never had been
Such a mummery seen
In the batter'd old circus tent,
As there came then about,
When the lights were put out,
And the rush of the audience was spent.

The full cast of the troupe,
From the star to the "supe"
The Clown-Dish and the Song-and-dance-Spoon,
A trim hussy as Cat
In jack-boots and cock'd-hat,
And the red-headed maid of the Moon.

The whole gang of them dress'd
In their maddest and best,
Hand in hand went careering around
The professional ring
Where a fire beat wing
Like a monster bird struck to the ground;

While in stately masque,
On an upended cask,
Sat old Pantaloon, ruling the feast,
With his arm resting on
A huge black demijohn
Made to hold a Norse wassail at least.

And all this because,
Amid "storms of applause,"
Little Muggins had, for the first time,
Faced the dreaded lime-lights,
In corselet and tights,
As the "Prince" in the new pantomime.

Little Muggins? A chit
Upon whom they had hit
Hap-hazard, one night, on the road,

And had carried along,
—As one picks up a song,
Just to lift the dead-weight off the load,—

Who had grown up, the child
Of them all, grown up wild
In a world which the big world ignores,
Yet lithe-limb'd, brown of flesh,
And as straight, strong, and fresh
As the world—the clean world, out-o'-doors.

And now the new Star,
Who will blaze near and far,
On poster and bill through the town,
In the plush and the plume
Of her Prince's costume,
In the pride of her fledgling renown,

Drawn up to full height:
In the leaping fire-light
One scarlet from tiptoe to throat,
Yet ashamed, in a way,
For one shy hand will stray
In search of the miss'd petticoat.

Well may they rejoice,
Make exceeding great noise,
Drain the demijohn dry to her fame,
For in years that have been,
Never fairer young Queen
Came to rule the cloud-realms of *Bohème.*

X.

The Beggars come to Town.

Hark! Hark! the dogs do bark;
The beggars are coming to town,
Some in rags, and some in tags,
And some in velvet gown.

IN tatters and trash, with clatter and crash
Of cymbals and trumpets and drums,
The mad cohort of the Miracles-Court,
A pageant of the slums.

Filchers and tramps, cripples and scamps,
The halt and the lame and the blind,
A motley crew, with a comet-cue
Of slatterns and brats behind.

Nimble Joes in yellow hose,
Blue giants and purple dwarfs,
Slender lads in crimson plaids,
And lassies with silver scarfs,

The gypsy scold in cloth of gold
As black and gnarl'd as Sin,
The pretty slut with nothing but
Her shift to hide her skin;

And in the core of the mad uproar
Like a lily, blossoming,
A beggar maid, yet one array'd
Past the glory of a king,

In her tatter'd cloud of a bridal shroud,
And patches of white Samite,
With her brown legs bare, her thick black hair,
And eyes of midsummer night.

No jewels deck the lithe young neck,
Her brows are ungirt with gold,
And yet is there not one more fair
In all the king's household.

Well might so be, for this is she
For whom Cophetua pines,
Nor finds he grace in court or chase,
Nor solace in festal wines,

Since first she came in beautiful shame
To kneel before his throne . . .
It seemed that earth held nothing worth
A king—save her alone.

And now they come, all Beggardom
In its glory gathering
From far and wide, to feast the bride
Elected by the king.

Let dogs go bark, and simples hark!
Sing hail! with a will and a way,
For the bride they bring to her lover-king,
This beggars' holiday.

XI.

Banbury Cross.

ONCE on a time a fine Lady rode
Into the East, when the morning glowed,
With silver bells at her saddle-cloth,
And her finger aflash with the ring of troth.

Into the East, where the morning sings
While the sea lies sunning her silver wings,
And the sunbeams dance thro' Banbury town
Fallen asleep on the gold sea down.

Ah! but it was a pleasure to see
The ride of this Lady of high degree,
Gems round her girdle, gold over her lap,
And crimson cock-feathers to plume her cap.

Maidens of honour, in silken attire—
Each pink maid shadow'd by scarlet squire—
Helmeted knights and velveted clowns,
Heralds with trumpets and pages with crowns.

Fair as Day, when the year is young,
And blythe as the laugh on a linnet's tongue,
Went she, red-rose with the joy to come,
For her lord and lover is coming home!

Home from his quest to the Holy Shrine,
Through the blood and fire of far Palestine,
Home to the lady who longs for him
With heart grown hungry and eyes grown dim.

On through the opening heart of the Spring
The lady went, with her plighting-ring,
Till against the film of the purple hills
Struck sharp old Banbury's gray bastilles.

Lo! as they rode into Banbury town,
A pilgrim lay in his russet gown,
Like a dog that is let to die in the street—
And this was the lover she rode to meet.

Thro' the wax and wane of the changing years,
A lady rides with wailing and tears,
A rich-clad lady—a lady mad—
Singing a song that is wondrous sad:

"Ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross,
To see a fine Lady ride on a grey horse,
Rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
And she shall have music wherever she goes."

XII.

Bobby Shafto.

Bobby Shafto's gone to sea:—
Silver buckles on his knee—
He'll come back and marry me,
Pretty Bobby Shafto!

WITH his treasures won at sea,
Spanish gold and Portugee,
And his heart, still fast to me
Pretty Bobby Shafto!

In a captain's pomp and pride,
With a gold sword at his side,
He'll come back to claim his bride,
Pretty Bobby Shafto!

So she sang, the winter long,
Till the sun came, golden-strong,
And the blue-birds caught her song:
All of Bobby Shafto.

Days went by, and Autumn came,
Eyes grew dim, and feet went lame,
But the song, it was the same,
All of Bobby Shafto.

Never came across the sea,
Silver buckles on his knee,
Bobby to his bride-to-be,
Fickle Bobby Shafto!

For where midnight never dies,
In the Storm-King's caves of ice,
Stiff and stark, poor Bobby lies—
Heigho! Bobby Shafto.

XIII.

Little Blue Betty.

Little Blue Betty lived in a lane,
She sold good ale to gentlemen.
Gentlemen came every day,
And little Blue Betty hopp'd away.

A RARE old tavern, this "Hand and Glove,"
That little Blue Betty was mistress of;
But rarer still than its far-famed taps
Were Betty's trim ankles and dainty caps.

So gentlemen came every day—
As much for the caps as the ale they say—
And call'd for their pots, and her mug to boot:
If it better'd their thirst they were welcome to 't;

For Betty, with none of those foolish qualms
Which come of inordinate singing of psalms,
Thought kissing a practice both hearty and hale,
To freshen the lips and smarten the ale.

So gallants came, by the dozen and score,
To sit on the bench by the trellised door,
From the full high noon till the shades grew long,
With their pots of ale, and snatches of song,

While little Blue Betty, in shortest of skirts,
And whitest of caps, and bluest of shirts,
Went hopping away, rattling pots and pence,
Getting kiss'd now and then as pleased Providence.

How well I remember! I used to sit down
By the door, with Byronic, elaborate frown
Staring hard at her, as she whisk'd about me,—
Being jealous as only calf-lovers can be,

Till Betty would bring me my favourite mug,
Her lips all a-pucker, her shoulders a-shrug,
And wheedle and coax my young vanity back,
So I fancied myself the preferr'd of the pack.

Ah! the dear old times! I turn'd out of my way,
As I travell'd westward the other day,
For a ramble among those boy-haunts of mine,
And a friendly nod to the crazy old sign.

The inn was gone—to make room, alas!
For a railroad buffet, all gilding and glass,
Where sat a proper young person in pink,
Selling ale———which I hadn't the heart to drink.

XIV.

Turn, Cheeses, Turn.

Green cheese, yellow laces,
Up and down the market-places,
Turn, cheeses, turn!
Where the orange-lanterns mellow
Moonlight green to glossy yellow,
Where red torches burn,

IN bright scarves and white chemises,
In the frill'd and flouncy cheeses
Of the farthingale,
Turn the Spanish maids and ladies
On the seaward place of Cadiz
At the Virgen's sale.

Such a festival of colour
Were a thing unknown in duller
Northern climes of ours;
Whitest rose to purplest pansy,
All the tones that painters fancy,
Through the scale of flowers,

And against the mat of blossoms,
Scarlet lips and amber bosoms
Flit like tempest-lights,
Till the market's many tables
Seem a garden from the fables
Of Arabian nights.

'Tis the night which priestly learning,
Knowing then all hearts are yearning,
All forms are fair,
Consecrates unto the Virgen,
For all hearts and lips to merge in
One perfumèd prayer.

And there is a superstition
That if Hope would have fruition,
Love-wish come to be,
One must turn and drop nine "cheeses:"
Three for the Father, three for Jesus,
For the Mother, three,

On this evening of St. Mary,
In the market annuary
Where all flower-kinds join,

Then of garden-girl or grass-man,
Buy a spotless sprig of jasmine
With a virgen coin.

If this sprig with Aves laden,
Be presented to the Maiden,
In her chapel niche,
Love will come: in Knightly armour,
Or in Court-robes—as the charmer
Who may call it, wish.

This is why all maids and ladies,
On the seaward place of Cadiz,
Where red torches burn,
—Green cheese and yellow laces—
Up and down the market-places,
Turn cheeses, turn.

XV.

Jumping Joan.

Hink! Mink! the old witch winks!
The fat begins to fry!
There is nobody home but Jumping Joan,
Jumping Joan and I.

IT'S the time when ashen-grey hazes drape
All form, and deaden all glow,
The hour when the Earth strips off Harlequin's cape,
Before putting on domino;

When the cupboards and chairs which have stood
stiff and stark
In the kitchen, for long hours back,
Make use of the stillness and fast-coming dark,
To stretch out their legs and crack;

And here, where the pots and kettles all hush,
While the housewife has gone to milk,
From behind the charr'd logs that soften to plush,
And the embers that glossen to silk,

With her towzled curls, her arms and legs bare,
In her old-fashioned smock and mob-cap,
Jumping Joan hops out of the dim hearth there,
And scrambles up into my lap.

And then she will talk——You would never believe
What a witch this Jumping Joan is!
What wonderful news she will manage to give,
What astonishing prophecies!

She will tell me the plan of to-morrow's fight,
My fight for the daily bread,
She will make me rehearse, till I get them right,
The things to be done then or said;

She will make odd finds in the nooks of my brain:
Some old memory gone astray—
The clue to some problem I work'd at in vain—
Or the rhyme which had dodged me all day;

She will bring good news, from the years to come,
Of the work which to-day seems ajar,
Or perhaps some love-worded message from
My dear little girl afar.

Yet her ways are so quiet, her voice is so soft,
That no one can hear her but I;
Not even the long-ear'd brass pitchers aloft,
Or good neighbour Cricket hard-by.

And so in the darkening, my Joan and I sit,
Telling stories that never tire,
Till somebody comes, and the lamp is lit:
Then Hop! she jumps into the fire.

XVI.

The Old Woman under the Hill.

There was an old woman lived under the hill,
And if she's not gone, she lives there still;
Baked apples she sold and cranberry pies,
And she's the old woman who never told lies.

A QUEER little body, all shrivelled and brown,
In her earth-colour'd mantle and rain-colour'd gown,
Incessantly fumbling strange grasses and weeds,
Like a ricketty cricket, a' saying its beads.

In winter or summer, come shine or come rain,
When the bustles and beams into twilight wane,
To the top of her hill, one can see her climb,
To sit out her watch through the long night-time.

The neighbourhood gossips have strange tales to tell—
As they sit at their knitting and tongues waggle well
Of the queer little crone who lived under the hill
When the grannies among them were hoppy-thumbs still.

She was once, they say, a young lassie, as fair
As white-wing'd hawthorn in April air,
When under the hill—one fine evening—she met
A stranger, the strangest maid ever saw yet:

From his crown to his heels he was clad all in red,
And his hair like a flame on his shoulders was shed;
Not a word spake he, but clutching her hand,
Led her off through the darkness to Shadowland.

What befell her there no mortal can tell,
But it must have been things indescribable,
For when she return'd, at the last, alone,
Her beauty was dead, and her youth was gone.

They gather'd about her: she shook her head
—She had been through Hell—that was all she said
In answer to whens, and hows, and whys;
So they took her word, for she never told lies.

And now, they say, when the sun goes down
This queer little woman, all shrivell'd and brown,
Turns into a beautiful lass, once more,
With gold-stranded hair and soft eyes as of yore,

And out of the hill in the stills and the gloams
Her beautiful fabulous lover comes,
In scarlet doublet and red silken hose,
To woo her again—till the Chanticleer crows.

And she, poor old crone, sits up on her hill
Through the long dreary night, till the dawn turns
chill,
And suffers in silence and patience alway,
In the hope that God will forgive, some day.

XVII.

My Little Wife.

I had a little wife, the prettiest ever seen,
She wash'd all my dishes, and kept the house clean;
She baked me my bread, she brew'd me my ale,
She sat by the fire and told a fine tale.

THE tale of a time that is cloudless noon,
Made sweet with the smells of the ripening June,
Made tuneful with all the fresh voices of life—
The tale of our Honeymoon, little wife!

When we ramble alone through our dream of dreams
A tale that is rhythmed with the dance of sunbeams,
And set to the music of thrushes and brooks,
There is not such another in all fairy books.

I've looked forward to this happy time many years,
In bright smiling dreams, ay, and sometimes through tears,

Though it hasn't come yet, I am certain it will,
The dear same story thou tellest me still.

It may be thy story will never come true
In this world, where the happenings of dreams are few;
No matter! we'll wait till we're under the sod,
There are other worlds after this, thank God!

When to each the other is all in all,
Let betide what will, let what can befall,
There are not sorrows enough on earth
To dull love's glamour, or cheapen its worth.

Meanwhile, we will live, and keep telling our tale,
Abiding its coming, though all else fail:
For all things that man can withhold or give
Must die, but our love is from God: it will live.

True face! which I never have look'd on in vain
When I wanted strength to be patient again,
Though thy lines grow dim, thy fresh colour dies,
And twilight has come in the dear, clear eyes,

Come sit down beside me, and tell me once more
The tale that has help'd me so often before.
I am sick of waiting, and hungry to laugh:
Come! tell it once more, little photograph!

XVIII.

Humpty-Dumpty.

BURN'D and bare, the sands are spread :
Fire implacable beats overhead,
Heavens like Hell, and beneath, there lies
An august head, with blind dreaming eyes.

Once on a time, was lifted higher
No kinglier head, from Carthage to Tyre,
No loftier stature the sun look'd on,
Not even Rhodes or Singing Memnon.

Æons sat on his huge calm brows,
As sparrows perch'd on the pitch of a house,
Tempests crouch'd at his foot, abash'd
Like fawning hounds by the master lash'd.

Far to the edge of the desert's girth
Stretch'd the shadow of him on the earth,
Cowering beneath like a thing afraid :
So was his fame on the vast world laid.

Nations came from far-away lands,
Over the deep, and the waste of sands,
Kissing the footstool his huge feet trod
To hail him High, Everlasting God.

Now he lies prone—he is fallen! Great Pan,
God of Gods, very Lord of Man,
A shapeless litter of shatter'd rock
For newts and lizards to spit at and mock.

None now come to hail his fame,
His greatness is gone, forgotten his name.
Motionless, changeless, unbounded, untrod
The desert broods o'er the broken God.

While on so much of its base that stands
Worn by the tides of men's lips, and the sands,
This is inscribed, in a cockney's scrawl,
Last and bloodiest gibe of all:

Humpty-Dumpty sat on a Wall.

XIX.

Little Boy Blue.

Little Boy Blue! Come blow up your horn.
The sheep's in the meadow, the cow's in the corn.
Where is the little boy tending the sheep?
He's under the haycock—fast asleep!

FAST asleep? with the sun noon high!
While the bread-getting moments go hurrying by,
Man and beast in the fields at work—
Does he think him alone privileged to shirk?

Tending the sheep! why, the veriest drone
Could do what little there is to be done:
Even that little's too much, so it seems!
Plague on all idlers and dreamers of dreams!

Half a year's treasure, wrenched from the soil
By dogged strain of unceasing toil,
Wantonly wasted, trod down under heel,
To pay for the sleep of a young ne'er-do-weel!

Labourer ! Labourer ! think, ere you blame
How often his horn's silver melody came,
Staying your courage, when courage had flagg'd,
Lighting the dead heavy burden you dragg'd :

Where do you think he has found them grow,
These wonderful songs which have cheer'd you so ?
Toil as you may, in the sweat of your brow,
You will find none such, where you delve and plough.

Farmer ! consider, oh ! you, who begrudge
That scant broken sleep of your hard-driven drudge,
All of us have not like tasks to fulfil,
There are other fields than your own to till !

He is of those who have ears to hear
A higher message than comes to your ear,
Eyes to see, back of Nature's blind mask,
The Great Face beckon to holier task.

He is of them who are called from the throng,
To work in the fields of immortal song,
Gleaning a harvest of golden grain,
Without which we labour and toil but in vain.

Somewhere, whither his dreams have led
Beyond the hills that purple ahead,
Fields are there to be harvested in
With the very bread of the soul to win.

Little Boy Blue ! Go sleep out your sleep,
Though the cow's in the corn, in the meadow the sheep,
Better to lose a whole harvest of corn
Than the tidings born from thy lifted horn.

XX.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

PHEW! that night! what a night it was!
Streets like glass—and the air wet gauze;
While round corners, half ice, half soot,
Pounced the wind, like some vicious brute.

As I pass'd, through the gusts and mists,
Somewhere—out of sight—fell the hour:
Twelve, from the chimes in the glum church-tower
Of the Four Evangelists.

It was late, and I was sore,
Hungry, sleepy, and cross as patch,
When I fancied, near the door,
Some one sang the olden catch:

Matthew! Mark! Luke, and John!
Guard the bed that I lie on;
One to watch and one to pray,
Two to bear my soul away!"

Was it fancy? No: it came,
Poor little squeak of tremulous song,
Quaking, quavering, stumbling alone,
Still a real voice, all the same.

Braced against the storm, I stood
For a time, to make more sure—
How the gusts stung! How they mewed!
Nick's own wind——God save the poor!

Someone there, sure: after a lull,
There it came again—the dull,
Wailing prayer, when Hope is gone:
"Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John."

Where was Matthew? Ah! where Mark,
Luke, and John? Did they hear or care
That some poor soul wept its prayer
On their doorstep, in the dark?

What with preachers all ayelp,
Grinding chaff into barren grists,
There's no spare time left for help
With the Four Evangelists.

There was none to hear the call,
So I started—after all,
Man must help when saints grow nice:
Nasty work on stairs of ice!

Slipping, scrambling I groped my way,
Step by step, till I reached the door;
There curl'd close upon the floor
In her rags, a little girl lay.

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,
Did you know there was lying there
One who believed, poor little one,
Saints inclined their ears to prayer?

In my arms I picked her up,
Poor little frozen gutter-pup;
Carried her to the nearest hole—
Anywhere for soup and coal.

There we warm'd her, nursed her well,
I and a red-nosed barkeeper,
But the song was gone from her:
Gone, and whither? Who can tell?

Ah! the vile old lying catch!
Mark had pray'd but a lip-deep prayer,
Matthew had gone to sleep on watch,
Luke and John, had they been there?

Pshaw! why should I rail upon
Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John?
Who were bold enough to say
She had a soul, to bear away?

XXI.

Margery Daw.

See-Saw! Margery Daw!
Sold her bed to lie upon straw;
Was she not a dirty slut
To sell her bed, and libe in dirt?

AND yet perchance, were the circumstance
But known, of Margery's grim romance,
As sacred a veil might cover her then
As the pardon which fell on the Magdalen.

It's a story told so often, so old,
So drearily common, so wearily cold:
A man's adventure,—a poor girl's fall—
And a sinless scapegoat born—that's all.

She was simple and young, and the song was sung
With so sweet a voice, in so strange a tongue,
That she follow'd blindly the Devil-song
Till the ground gave way, and she lay headlong.

And then: not a word, not a plea for her heard,
Not a hand held out to the one who had err'd,
Her Christian sisters foremost to condemn—
God pity the woman who falls before them!

They closed the door for evermore
On the contrite heart which repented sore,
And she stood alone, in the outer night,
To feed her baby as best she might.

So she sold her bed, for its daily bread,
The gown off her back, the shawl off her head,
Till her all lay piled on the pawner's shelf,
Then she clench'd her teeth and sold herself.

And so it came that Margery's name
Fell into a burden of Sorrow and Shame,
And Margery's face grew familiar in
The market-place where they trade in sin.

What use to dwell on this premature Hell?
Suffice it to say the child did well,
Till one night that Margery prowled the town,
Sickness was stalking, and struck her down.

Her beauty pass'd, and she stood aghast
In the presence of want, and stripped, at the last,
Of all she had to be pawned or sold,
To keep her darling from hunger and cold.

So the baby pined, till Margery, blind
With hunger of fever, in body and mind,
At dusk, when Death seem'd close at hand,
Snatch'd a loaf of bread from a baker's stand.

Some Samaritan saw Margery Daw,
And lock'd her in gaol to lie upon straw:
Not a sparrow falls, they say—Oh well!
God was not looking when Margery fell.

With irons girt, in her felon's shirt,
Poor Margery lies in sorrow and dirt,
A gaunt, sullen woman untimely grey,
With the look of a wild beast, brought to bay.

See saw! Margery Daw!
What a wise and bountiful thing, the Law!
It makes all smooth—for she's out of her head,
And her brat is provided for. It's dead.

XXII.

Curly-locks.

Curly-locks! Curly-locks! Wilt thou be mine?
Thou shalt not wash the dishes, nor yet feed the swine;
But sit on a cushion, and sew a fine seam,
And feed upon strawberries, sugar, and cream.

EVERY day can I see, from my window-seat,
The queer little cottage across the High-street,
With its roof, cocked over the round peep-hole
In a solemn frown, inexpressibly droll.

And there—through the cobwebs of climbing vine,
Like a quaint mediæval medallion-design—
The turned-up nose and dimpled young chin
Of Curly-locks, hard at work within.

Hard at work! From dawn to dark,
Her little hand travels its wearisome arc
From the patient lap, then back again,
In sameness of toil, that saddens like pain.

And yet, whenever she lifts her eyes,
Such a spell of youth in her swift glance lies,
That the lamp-posts wink her a rusty smile,
The steeple-clock cackles, in joy senile,

And a smother'd peal of laughter runs rife,
Through the bald old street's monotonous life:
The sun shines brightest, the breeze sings best,
In the sacred circle her eyes have bless'd;

And I fall to thinking, watching her sew—
This dear little girl I have grown to know
So well, that her hair with its loose sunbeams,
And her strange eyes haunt me, and sing with my
dreams—

To thinking of one who was wont to be
The shine and shadow of life to me,
Whose spirit still cleaves to me, beckoning on . . .
My darling, these many years dead and gone.

There was the self-same wonderful charm
In the turn of her neck, the trick of her arm,
The same magic look in the eyes of her
Which made all seasons seem Midsummer.

It 's childish perhaps—but I 'm growing old,
And this huge still house is so barren and cold,
And peoples so strangely at close of day,
With sounds of the dead, and smells of the clay,

That I long for Curly-locks, over the street,
Long for the patter of quick light feet,
The ring of her laughter about the place,
The touch of her hands, the shine of her face,

And my heart cries out, If she were but near,
If she could sit down by my arm-chair here,
I could close my eyes, and fancy then
My darling come home to the house again.

Curly-locks ! Curly-locks ! Wilt thou be mine ?
Bring me thy laughter, thy sweet sunshine :
I am parch'd for love, oh ! take pity on
A poor old woman, whose child is gone.

XXIII.

The Old Man in Leather.

One misty moisty morning, when cloudy was the weather,
I chanced to meet an old man clothed all in leather;
He began to compliment, and I began to grin:
How do you do? and How do you do? And how do you do?
again.

A STRANGE old man! and strangely clad!
most strange his mode of greeting!
And yet I felt instinctively this was no strangers'
meeting:
There was a something once well known, this un-
known face behind,
As some old tune, the words of which have fallen
out of mind.

He walk'd in silence at my side until we reach'd
my gateway,
I turn'd in, paused to nod good-bye: he gravely
bow'd, and straightway
Pass'd on before me to my room, threw wide the
door, and took
A seat which fronts the old arm-chair in my
favourite chimney-nook.

It had been human to resent his treating me so
queerly;
And yet I felt nor wrath nor pique—a sort of
wonder merely:
Where had I seen this face before? Why should he
feel at home
In this, my room? Who was the man? Whence?
Wherefore had he come?

I am not bless'd with many friends, I have nor
wife, nor daughters,
Not even sunshine ever comes to cheer my bachelor
quarters:
A poor old bookworm left alone in my sere and
yellow leaf,
What have I worth the coming for, to lover, snob,
or thief?

Besides, this was no common face I saw in my new-
comer,
But nobly lined: a face that read like a kingly page
of Homer;
His suit was odd, yet rich withal—gold-figured
black shagreen,
The very dress that Shakspere now, or Rabelais
revels in.

So while I lean'd back in my chair, my puzzled fancy started
In search of clues, among the dust and drift of years departed,
As he sat silent, with cross'd hands, his eyes held fast to mine:
Grave eyes, that held a world of love, and pity almost divine.

Then from the deep beyond those eyes, that never closed or wander'd,
Rose slowly his identity before me, as I ponder'd;
And though he lifted not a hand, and though he spake no word,
With all my soul I knew him then, with every pulse I heard.

This was the guide I followed once, in days long unremember'd,
On land and sea, through solitudes and castles many chamber'd,
Who taught my heart to blossom out, who taught my lips to sing,
Who roused a sleeping god in me: my Prophet— Poet— King.

He told of battles waged and won by deeds of
marvellous omen,
Of highest homage earn'd from men, and noblest
love from women
Of youth's most radiant promises and wildest dreams
fulfill'd,
Just as a child had pictured once, just as a fool had
will'd.

No need was there to tell his name, no need to
speak his meaning,
I recognized him through the mists of ages
intervening,
This was the Ghost which in my dreams the
Future show'd to me:
Myself! that never was; alas, myself! that could
not be.

And now? the pity of it all! my hopes, and dreams,
and longings
The Future and its righting hand, the Past and all
its wrongings
Have left me naked at the last before this Face of
old,
To read it as it were a book, a story that is told.

XXIV.

Baa! Baa! Black Sheep.

Baa! Baa! Black Sheep! Have you any wool?
Yea, that have I: three bags full:
One for my master, one for my dame,
One for the little boy who lives down the lane.

WOOL, that never rams nor ewes
Bleach'd in sunshine, washed in dews,
Wool that never, for maid or man,
Summer shore or Winter span.

But a fleece that unseen hands
Gathered in the Fairy lands,
From the clouds of shadowy sheep
In the starfields of the Deep;

Woven on the loom of night
Into scarves of scented light,
Of a woof more fair and frail
Than October's frosted veil.

When the West is throbbing yet
With a memory of Sunset,
And coy Night attunes her lute,
Blind sweet bard whose lips are mute,

Then is set my time to come
From my kingdom of the gloam,
Bearing in my three bags full
Scarves that are spun of the marvel wool,

One for my master—lying prone,
Panting for the day's toil done,
Wet with sweat that halloweth—
One for my master, black as Death,

One for my dame, whose wan hands rest
Cross'd upon her holy breast
In its mother-fashion fashion bare,
One for my dame, as white as Prayer;

One for my little boy, curled up tight,
As a flower-bud folds at night.
Silver scarf with golden seams,
Arabesqued with scarlet dreams.

And if God but will it so,
In the morning when I go,
I may leavé my scarves——Ah ! then
Peace at the last will be with men.

EPILOGUE.

WHEN I began this loose handful of rhymes
I had no other purpose than to vary
Thy solemn saws and sayings centenary
With fresher costumes and new pantomimes,
Dear Mother Goose! that, as in olden times,
So now, thou shouldst still be the bounteous fairy
Who brings rich gifts of mirth—a drone's vagary,
As one who sets a wording to the chimes;
But as the work went on, the purpose heighten'd,
—For verses, like the wind, blow where they list—
It is not thou who peerest through the mist
Of childish dreams, the graying years off-frighten'd
But one—a mother's face—with eyes love-lighten'd,
Who used to bend above me to be kiss'd.

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" of the actual wr. a Fool's Cap we, at least, know this much, despite the evident reluctance on the part of himself while living & of his friends & relatives when dead, to give details: that he was born previous to the Civil War in Covington, Kentucky; that he was the son of a wealthy merchant doing business in New Orleans, & that during his father's life he called himself Daniel Henry Junior, whereas his full name was Daniel Henry Junior Holmes. ..... On his mother's side there was English blood which may account for this first book being published in London".

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also – "A Pedlar's Pack", by Daniel Henry Holmes. New York: Ernest Dressel North: 1906. 250 copies on Italian hand-made paper. 12 mo. pp. XII+1-146. Decorated half-vellum grey boards.

and – "Hempen Home-spun Songs"

The Geo. B. Jennings Co.: Cincinnati, Ohio 1906. Quarto, gilt, decorated wrapper.

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